

"Paiute Wadatika Ma-Ni-Pu-Neen"

The Burns Paiute Reservation is located north of Burns, Oregon in Harney County. The current tribal members are primarily the descendants of the "Wadatika" band of Paiute Indians that roamed in central and southern Oregon.

History and Cultural Background of the Burns Paiute Tribe

Nine thousand years ago the northern Great Basin, which is now desert, was probably a series of very large lakes. The ancestors of the Burns Paiute people lived in caves near their shores. Horses, camels, mammoths, bison, elk and deer roamed the hills. These people used the fibers of the tule plant, willow, Indian hemp, and sagebrush bark to make woven sandals, coiled and twined baskets, and rope. They also made duck decoys, fish nets, and traps for small game with these fibrous plants. A beautiful soft blanket woven from the furs of rabbits and child's sandals made from sagebrush fibers were found preserved for close to 10,000 years in a cool, dry cave. Archeologists also found clothing made from deer, animal and bird hides. Their diet included a wide variety of items, such as fish (including a great deal of salmon), birds, deer, small animals, plants and seeds.

During the next one to 2,000 years, the climate slowly became drier and warmer. The lakes began drying up and food sources were less readily available. By 7,500 years ago, large mammals such as horses, camels and mammoth were extinct. People began seasonal migrations to take advantage of plants and animals in certain areas. Small family groups would travel separately collecting seeds, berries, roots, hunting small animals, deer, mountain sheep, elk and fish.

These smaller groups came together to harvest, socialize and intermarry with other Paiutes, as well as other Indian tribes. Spring offered roots to be gathered on the sunny hillsides and meadows, and fishing for salmon during the salmon runs. During the summer, berries and fruit were collected as food and stored for winter use. By late summer and early fall, seeds were the main resource to be gathered. Families also came together during this time of the year for communal antelope and rabbit drives. Late fall was the time to collect plant material to make items such as sandals, baskets, and clothing during the long winter months. By November, the families had gathered the cached goods they had put away during the months of harvesting. Materials were then gathered from the area (sagebrush in the desert or tules near the lakes) and they built houses near springs in which to live out the winter. The Paiutes lived in this manner for thousands of years.

The Paiute people believe that the Paiutes have lived in this area since before the Cascade Mountains were formed as they have learned from their stories and legends. Recent researchers, on the other hand, believe that about 1,000 years ago an influx of Paiute-speaking people came from the south and migrated throughout the Great Basin. They brought with them not only their language but also certain types of atlatl and spear points, and brownware pottery. Pottery was not found in the Great Basin before this time. However, the people of the Burns Paiute Tribe were basket makers and did not make pottery. According to the researchers, the language spoken here before the arrival of the Paiute is unknown. This, however, contradicts the Paiute stories and legends that are handed down from generation to generation which tell of the Paiute people living in the Great Basin for thousands and thousands of years.

The Burns Paiute Tribe descended from the Wadatika band, named after the wada seeds they collected near the shores of Malheur Lake to use as food. Bands were usually named after an important food source in their area. The Wadatika's territory included approximately 52,500

Welcome!

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square miles between the Cascade Mountain Range in central Oregon and the Payette Valley north of Boise, Idaho, and from southern parts of the Blue Mountains near the headwaters of the Powder River north of John Day, to the desert south of Steens Mountain.